

**IN THE CLAIMS:**

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikethrough~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. (currently amended) An image processing apparatus, to which an image including a line pattern ~~such as a character, a ruled line, a graphic, etc. is input~~, outputting a corresponding binary image, comprising:
  - a slightly indistinct binary image generating unit generating a first image that includes almost an entire shape of a line pattern although the shape is indistinct;
  - a shape-preserved binary image generating unit generating a second image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern and also includes noise in a background area other than a neighborhood of the line pattern; and
  - an image combining unit ~~combining the first and the second images for each pixel~~ performing AND operation between the first and second images, and generating a satisfactory binary image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern while preserving the shape and does not include the noise in the background area.
2. The image processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a background noise eliminating unit eliminating the noise in the background area from the first and the second images.
3. (currently amended) An image processing apparatus, to which an image including a line pattern is input, outputting a corresponding binary image, comprising:
  - a slightly indistinct binary image generating unit generating a first image that includes almost an entire shape of a line pattern although the shape is indistinct;
  - a shape-preserved binary image generating unit generating a second image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern and also includes noise in a background area other than a neighborhood of the line pattern;
  - an image combining unit combining the first and second images for each pixel, and generating a satisfactory binary image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern while preserving the shape and does not include the noise in the background area, and~~The~~

~~image processing apparatus according to claim 2, wherein~~

a background noise eliminating unit eliminating the noise in the background area from the first and the second images; and said background noise eliminating unit eliminates the background noise by classifying concatenated components into a concatenated component including a line pattern and a concatenated component being background noise based on distributions of the number of black pixels to an average edge intensity of 4- or 8-concatenated components of black pixels of a binary image being an input first or second image, and by removing a concatenated component determined to be the background noise.

4. (currently amended) An image processing apparatus, to which an image including a line pattern is input, outputting a corresponding binary image, comprising:

a slightly indistinct binary image generating unit generating a first image that includes almost an entire shape of a line pattern although the shape is indistinct;

a shape-preserved binary image generating unit generating a second image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern and also includes noise in a background area other than a neighborhood of the line pattern;

an image combining unit combining the first and second images for each pixel, and generating a satisfactory binary image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern while preserving the shape and does not include the noise in the background area, and  
~~information processing apparatus according to claim 2, wherein~~

a background noise eliminating unit eliminating the noise in the background area from the first and the second images; and said background noise eliminating unit determines a certain pixel to be a background pixel if a standard deviation or an average density difference of densities of neighboring pixels of the certain pixel of an input first or second image is within a predetermined range.

5. The image processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein  
the first and the second images are generated by performing the Niblack local binarization method for an input image.

6. The image processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein  
the Yanowitz and Bruckstein's postprocessing is performed for an output of said image combining unit.

7. (currently amended) An image processing method inputting an image including a line pattern ~~such as a character, a ruled line, a graphic, etc.~~, and outputting a corresponding binary image, comprising:

generating a first image that includes almost an entire shape of a line pattern although the shape is indistinct;

generating a second image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern and also includes noise in a background area other than a neighborhood of the line pattern; and

performing AND operation between the first and second images~~combining the first and the second images for each pixel~~, and generating a satisfactory binary image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern while preserving the shape, and does not include the noise in the background area.

8. (currently amended) A program for causing an information processing device to execute an image processing method inputting an image including a line pattern ~~such as a character, a ruled line, a graphic, etc.~~, and outputting a corresponding binary image, the method comprising:

generating a first image that includes almost an entire shape of a line pattern although the shape is indistinct;

generating a second image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern and also includes noise in a background area other than a neighborhood of the line pattern; and

performing AND operation between the first and second images~~combining the first and the second images for each pixel~~, and generating a satisfactory binary image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern while preserving the shape, and does not include the noise in the background area.

9. (currently amended) A storage medium readable by an information processing device, on which is recorded a program for causing the information processing device to execute an image processing method inputting an image including a line pattern ~~such as a character, a ruled line, a graphic, etc.~~, and outputting a corresponding binary image, the method comprising:

generating a first image that includes almost an entire shape of a line pattern although the shape is indistinct;

generating a second image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern and also includes noise in a background area other than a neighborhood of the line pattern; and

performing AND operation between the first and second images~~combining the first and~~

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~~the second images for each pixel,~~ and generating a satisfactory binary image that includes almost the entire shape of the line pattern while preserving the shape, and does not include the noise in the background area.